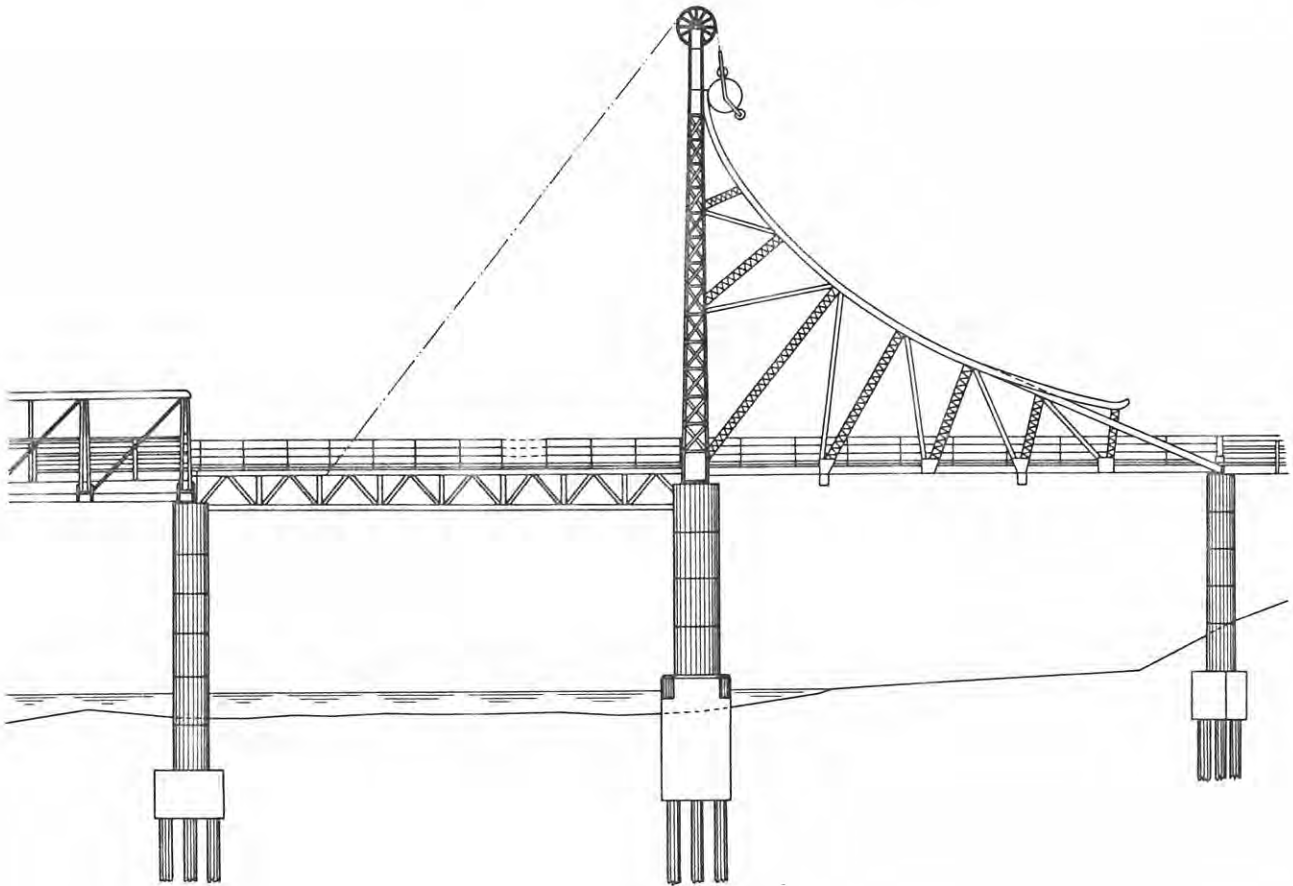


The Old Bridge at Darlington Point



Some dimensions and details about the old bridge over the Murrumbidgee River and Darlington Point were published in the Annual Reports of the Department of Public Works. In the 1902-03 Report under "Works in Progress" (p. 59), there is the following entry.

"In order to provide for navigation, a bascule span has been provided in this bridge. This span is of the rolling weight type, similar in principle to that recently completed at Telegraph Point, Wilson's River, but affording a wider opening than was provided in the latter bridge. The opening span, towers and track for the rolling balance weights are of steel and the bridge also includes a composite truss span of 91 feet and 15 beam spans of 30 feet each. The main piers consist

of cylinders on pile foundations."

The next Report for the year ended 30 June 1904 mentioned that the bascule span provided "a clear opening of 60 feet for the river traffic, which consists of river steamers and barges". It added that the contract cost of the work was £13,000.

The 1904-05 Report noted that the bascule span was "similar to that on Coraki Bridge". It also stated that "the river piers consist each of a pair of iron cylinders, supported upon concrete bases carried on timber piles".

The official opening of the bridge was held on Wednesday, 28 June 1905 and was reported as follows in the Narandera (sic) Argus of 30 June 1905.

"DARLINGTON POINT BRIDGE

THE OPENING CEREMONY (By Wire from our Special Reporter), **DARLINGTON POINT, THURSDAY**

The opening of the magnificent steel bascule bridge over the Murrumbidgee at Darlington Point was celebrated on Wednesday in cloudy but fine weather.

There was an attendance of over 500 people at the ceremony and at the monster children's picnic and sports earlier in the day.

A four-horse drag met distinguished guests at Darlington Railway Station, and conveyed them to the town. Here a procession met them, headed by the Narandera Town Band, children of the district schools, members of the Celebration Committee, and prominent

residents. The procession moved from the main street to the bridge.

Mr. R. Scobie, M.L.A., delivered the opening oration; after which Mrs. A. J. Cummings, as the oldest lady resident in the district, cut the ribbon, and the bridge was declared open.

Mrs. Cummings was then presented with a silver knife and an enlarged photograph of the bridge, amid roars of cheers.

The banquet was held soon afterwards and was largely attended. The following toasts were proposed:— "The King and Queen" by the Chairman. "Our Visitors", coupled with the names of Mr. R. Scobie, M.L.A. and Mr. F. A. Byrne, late member for the district. Messrs. Scobie and Byrne responded with able speeches; and the toast was also responded to by Messrs. John Jacob, F. Harrison and others. Mr. Herman Kook proposed "The Parliament"; and in reply Mr. Scobie outlined the present Parliamentary programme. The toast of the evening

was the "Bridge Opening", coupled with the name of Mr. W. Farquaharson, the contractor, Mr. Farquaheon (sic) being absent in Sydney, Mr. Rorison responded on his behalf. "Pastoral and Agricultural Interests" was proposed by Mr. H. Kook and responded to by Messrs. Harrison and McKinney. "Commerce and Trade" was responded to by Mr W. Legge, Mr. J. J. Gallagher and Mr. A. J. McAlister. Mr. Batty (sic) proposed "The Press", and Mr. A. J. McAlister responded, apologising for the unavoidable absence of absent pressmen. Mr. J. L. Bennett proposed "The Ladies", responded to by Mr. J. J. Gallagher. Mr. Scobie proposed "The Celebration Committee", and Mr. MacDonald responded. Mr. Kook proposed "The Chairman", and Mr. Scobie responded. Mr. Beatty then proposed the toast of "The Bridge Employees".

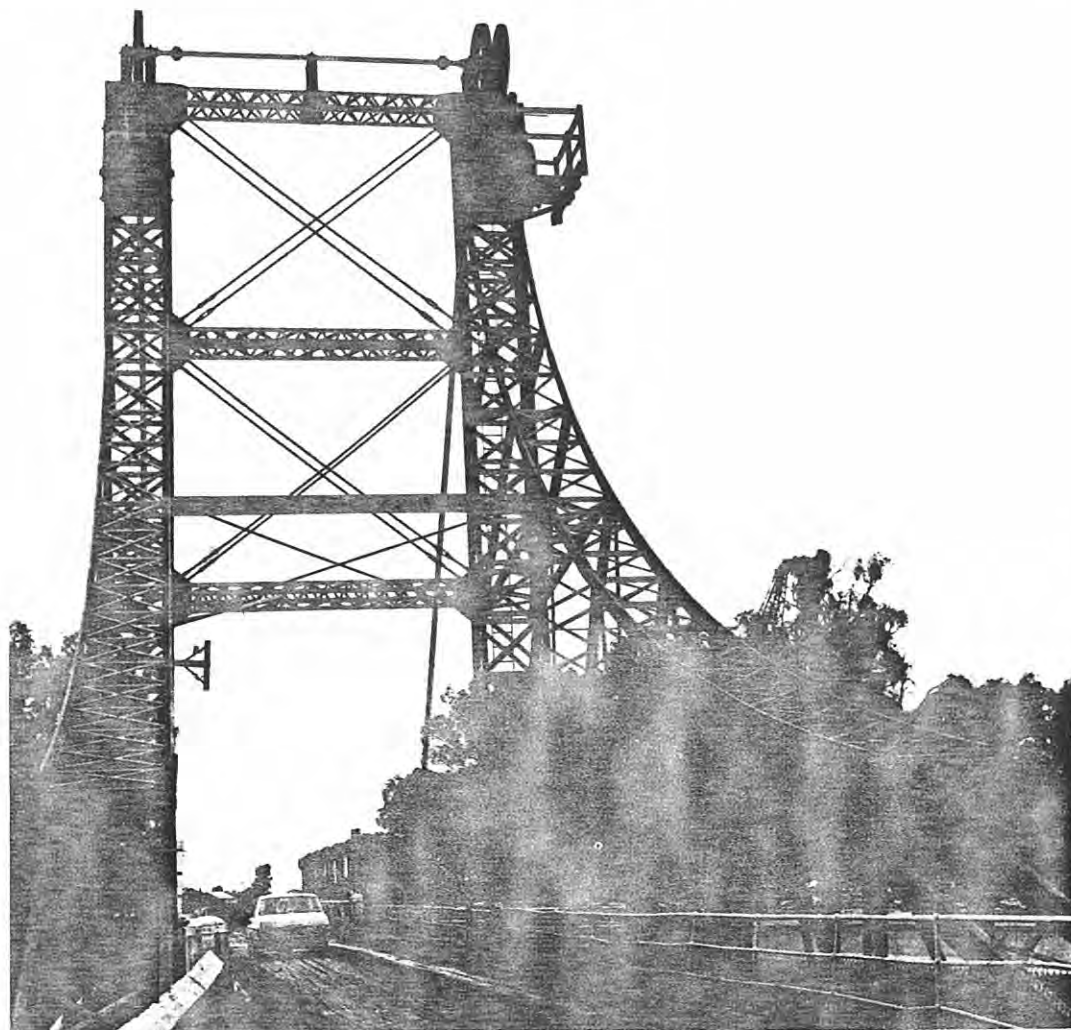
Mr. Scobie, in the course of his speech, commended the committee for the completeness of their arrangements, which, he said reflected the highest credit

on all connected with the celebrations. The large gathering was only fitting the importance of the occasion.

Over 100 people attended the banquet, and seventy couples were present at the ball, which started at nine o'clock in the hall. The floor and music were all that could be wished; and the costumes of the ladies were charming. Among those ladies whose dresses attracted attention were Misses Keeble (2), A. Jones, M. Barnes, Gallagher, Alford, Kook, McGrath, (2), Wilson, Curphy, Connelly and many others.

Mr. Keed, of Junee supplied the marquee for the banquet, which was handsomely decorated. Excellent refreshments were also provided at the ball. Dancing continued until late this morning." ●

This photograph illustrates the tall towers of the old bridge and the curved tracks down which counter-weights travelled when the bascule span was opened.



NEW MURRUMBIDGEE BRIDGES

Replacing reminders of our paddle-wheel past

On 13 December 1978, two new bridges were made available to traffic over the Murrumbidgee River and its flood channel at Darlington Point.

They replaced two earlier structures, the main of which incorporated a bascule-type lift span. Although inoperative for many years, the lift span and its associated components have remained as reminders of a romantic past. A past when river traffic was an important transport mode for passengers and commercial goods in the Riverina region.

Early settlement

Darlington Point is situated on Main Road No. 321 just north of that road's junction with the Sturt Highway (State Highway No. 14) west of Narrandera.

Charles Sturt and his party passed by this now historic location on 17 December 1829, as they explored downstream along the banks of the Murrumbidgee. The river's name is derived from an aboriginal term meaning "big (or everflowing) water".

It was some years before the country charted by Sturt's exploration was settled, due to the limits imposed by the Government of the time. However, by the end of 1844, all the land on river frontages in the Darlington Point area had been occupied.

Darlington Point's early prominence was mainly as a steamer port. The first paddle steamer to navigate the Murrumbidgee River reached Darlington Point on 17 September 1859.

From then on, the river trade developed quite quickly. Gundagai was too far up the river to be visited regularly, but considerable river trade came as far as Narrandera. In fact, Narrandera was the chief port of the district until the coming of the railway in the 1880s. Narrandera

is about 63 road kilometres east of Darlington Point, but, naturally, the distance is considerably greater along the meanders of the Murrumbidgee River.

Darlington Point developments

The settlement at Darlington Point (proclaimed a village on 18 May 1901) grew on both sides of the river. In 1875 the two parts were linked by a punt.

In 1905, the Murrumbidgee River and the flood channel to its north were bridged (see following article on pp.45-46). The main structure (currently still standing) is 206 m long, while the flood channel crossing (also still in existence) measures 93.3 m. The main bridge was equipped with a steel bascule lift span to allow steamers to pass. The 3.7 m width of this span limited the bridge capacity to one traffic lane — with no footway.

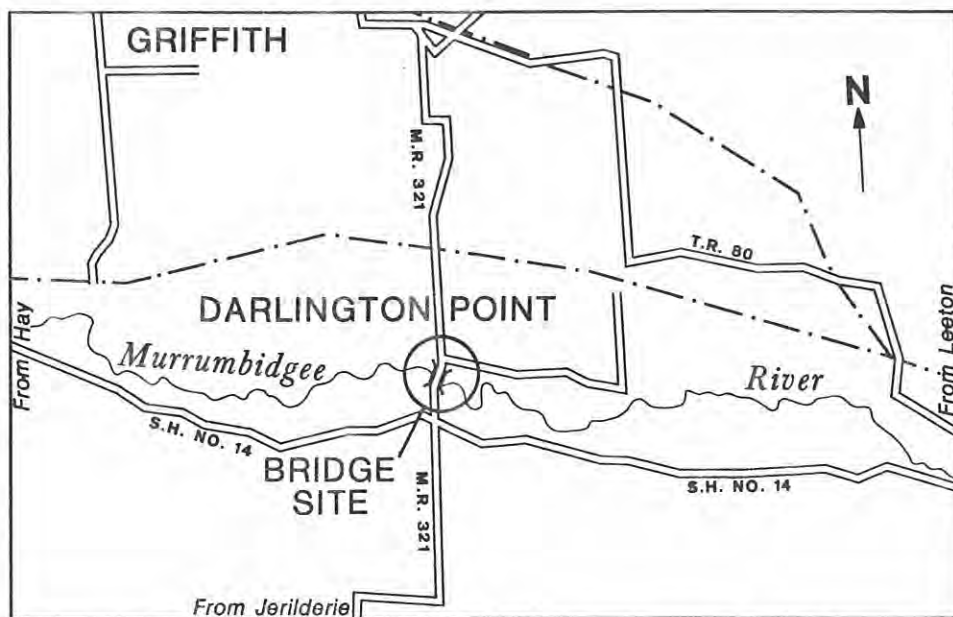
The coming of competition

In August 1881 the railway reached the town of Darlington, about 18 km north

of Darlington Point. This, along with the gradual improvements in roads in the area, meant the eventual passing of the steamers which were hampered and delayed during times of drought or severe flooding. Some still plied their way on the river as late as the 1930s, carrying mainly wool and timber, but by the end of the decade this river trade had virtually died out.

In passing, it should be mentioned that the name "Darlington" no longer appears on maps of the State, except as the name of a Sydney suburb. Possibly to avoid confusion, the country town's name was changed to Willbriggie in July 1909.

As mentioned earlier, Darlington Point is on Main Road No. 321 which, as the southern outlet for the produce of Griffith and the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, is perhaps the most important Ordinary Main Road in the Riverina. It links three State Highways, extending from the Newell Highway, north of



at Historic Darlington Point

Jerilderie to the Sturt Highway and then northwards again to the Mid Western Highway, west of Rankins Springs.

With the continuing expansion of the rice, wheat, wine and fruit-growing industries in the area, and the development of the Coleambally Irrigation Area nearby, the old bridge at Darlington Point and its narrow carriageway, was being placed under considerable pressure.

Needs and problems

New bridges over the Murrumbidgee River at this location had been sought for many years, as the rapid development of the Murrumbidgee Valley for irrigation agriculture continued.

Design investigations for the new bridges commenced in the late 1960s. Both of the new bridges were designed for the Department by Messrs. Taylor and Herbert, Consulting Engineers, and in June 1974, tenders were called for a main structure 170 metres long and a flood channel bridge 96 metres long.

A contract for the work was let in September 1974. Unfortunately, continuing high river levels over the next four months prevented any work taking place, and the contract was finally cancelled by mutual agreement in March 1975.

A new contract for the bridges was let in February 1977, to the Wagga Wagga firm of Siebels Concrete Constructions Pty Ltd with a contract price of \$1,077,459.

Work under way

Work started early in 1977 and soon after coffer-dams were set up in the river for the sinking of the central cast-in-place piles. A concrete batching plant was installed at the bridge site. Prestressed girders and deck units were fabricated at Narromine and work on a new river bridge (just 20 metres upstream of the old one) was well under way when, in July 1977, some doubts were expressed as to the adequacy of the waterway area being provided. Fears were expressed that the

slightly decreased waterway might increase the chances of flood damage to the nearby areas.

In August 1977, a decision was made to extend the river bridge by two spans, increasing its length to approximately 206 metres. The change in design caused an inevitable delay to the completion of the bridges and an equally inevitable rise in the final price. The approximate costs were \$930,000 for the main river bridge and \$400,000 for the flood channel bridge.

The amended design of the bridge over the main channel provided for eight spans of 19.05 m and three spans of 17.78 m giving an overall bridge length of 205.74 m. The bridge over the flood channel consists of 7 spans of 13.72 m, giving an overall bridge length of 96.04 m.

Identical in section

The widths of the two new bridges are identical at 11.28 m. Each provides a



Construction of the new bridge beside the old structure as at July 1978.



carriageway of 8.45 m, a footpath 2.20 m wide on the downstream side, and a kerb 0.54 m wide on the upstream side. Provision for carrying public utility services over the river has been made in a duct under the precast concrete slabs of the footway of each structure.

In the initial site investigation, foundation studies revealed thick layers of clay and sand. The foundations of the bridges consist of bored cast-in-situ concrete piles. These rely on both end-bearing and skin friction of the piles against the surrounding strata to support loads of up to 100 tonnes per pile over the main channel section, and up to 60 tonnes per pile over the flood channel section.

Abutments for both bridges are of the simple spill-through type and piers consist of solid walls 5.5 m wide supporting cantilevered headstocks which in turn provide the support for the deck.

Five pretensioned concrete bridge girders, 1.12 m deep, have been used in each span of the bridge over the main channel. These are spaced at 2.44 m

centres. The deck is cast-in-situ concrete 180 mm thick. Cross girders have been provided at the ends and at the one-third points of each span.

Eighteen pretensioned bridge units, 0.45 m deep, in which deflected strands have been used, provide the support for a 150 mm thick cast-in-situ concrete deck for the bridge over the flood channel.

Expansion joints have been provided at the abutments of both bridges and adjacent spans have been tied together to provide a carriageway free of joints on the bridges themselves. Flexible rubber bearings have been used to support the deck beams for both bridges.

Safety, efficiency, economy

The completion of these new bridges across the Murrumbidgee River provides an improved link between the two parts of Darlington Point. They give easy and uninterrupted flow for both local and through traffic and ensure safe pedestrian access for the 660 residents of the town. In addition, a major restriction on Main Road No. 321

New and old bridges over the flood channel to the north of the main Murrumbidgee River crossing. July 1978.

between Griffith and its southern markets has been removed, allowing heavy traffic to move freely across the Murrumbidgee River with greater safety than possible with the 1905 structures. Another important benefit is that, in the future, maintenance costs for the bridges at this crossing will be considerably reduced. •

Official Opening of New Bridge at Darlington Point

The ceremony to mark the official opening of the new bridge over the Murrumbidgee River at Darlington Point was held on Friday, 27 April 1979.

Official guests, together with interested local residents and pupils from the nearby school, gathered at the bridge site and witnessed the proceedings. Those in attendance included the Hon. Harry Jensen, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Roads; the Hon. Lin Gordon, Minister for Conservation and Minister for Water Resources, and Member for Murrumbidgee; Mr. J. FitzPatrick, M.P., Federal Member for Riverina; and Councillor J. E. McInnes, President of the Shire of Murrumbidgee.

Other guests included Mr. J. B. Cunneen, Chief Commissioner for Water Resources and the Shire Presidents from the Shires of Wade (Councillor R.W.V. Irvin), Leeton (Councillor W. Barnhill), and Jerilderie (Councillor T. Hogan).

The ceremony commenced at 11.00 a.m. with the playing of the National Tune "Advance Australia Fare", following which Mr. Bruce Loder, Deputy Commissioner for Main Roads addressed the gathering. Mr. Loder apologised for the absence of the Commissioner for Main Roads, Mr. B. J. Sexton who had, at short notice, been required to attend urgent discussions of considerable significance to road finance.

Seventy-four years after her father opened the original Darlington Point bridge, Miss Agnes Scobie cuts the ribbon for the new bridge. On the right is the Hon. Harry Jensen, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Roads, and on the left is Mrs. B. N. Loder, wife of the Deputy Commissioner for Main Roads.

After speaking briefly about the need for the new bridge and about its structural details, Mr. Loder introduced Councillor J. E. McInnes, who welcomed the visitors to the Shire of Murrumbidgee. During his talk, he emphasised the importance of the new bridge in providing an important link between the Murrumbidgee and Colleambally Irrigation Areas. Mr. McInnes also underlined the particular

significance of the new bridge as a better link to the regional towns of Leeton and Griffith.

The Hon. Lin Gordon, reinforced many of the welcoming remarks of Mr. McInnes, making special reference to his parliamentary colleague Mr. Jensen.

Mr J. FitzPatrick, M.P., congratulated the Government and the groups of people



who were responsible for bringing the bridge into existence. He said it would allow traffic to flow more freely and would provide a connection between the great agricultural areas, pastoral areas and mining districts of the State.

The Hon. Harry Jensen, M.P., Minister for Local Government and Minister for Roads was then invited to officially open the bridge.

Mr. Jensen commenced by remarking on the delightful weather, noting that, prior to the day it had been raining heavily. He made special mention of the privileges which all Australians share, pointing out that we have undisputed occupation of an entire continent, we are one people speaking one language, and we have access to enormous resources.

Mr. Jensen made reference to the early history of the area and to the fact that Darlington Point's early prominence was mainly as a steamer port. At this point Mr. Jensen mentioned the first bridge which was opened to traffic on 28 June 1905 by the then Member for Murray, Mr. Robert Scobie, M.L.A. (see detailed report on page 45). One of those present on that occasion was Mr. Scobie's 19 year old daughter Agnes.

Seventy four years later, a spritely 93 years young Miss Scobie was an official guest at the opening ceremony of the new bridge. Miss Scobie is now a resident of the Sydney suburb of Collaroy and had flown from Sydney that morning to attend the ceremony. For Miss Scobie it

was a momentous and historic occasion, not only because of the opening ceremony but also because it was her first flight.

Mr. Jensen introduced Miss Scobie to the gathering and said that in 1905 her father had invited Mrs. A. J. Cummings, the oldest lady resident in the district, to cut the ribbon. Mr. Jensen said that he would follow the pattern set by Mr. Scobie and invite Miss Scobie to cut the ribbon.

Mr. Jensen continued . . .

"Ladies and gentlemen I'm delighted, honoured, elated at having the privilege of sharing with you this significant occasion. I thank each one of you for the compliment of your presence and now declare the bridge to be officially open and ask Miss Scobie to come with me in order that we can do the 'scissors job'. If anyone should see anybody with a sword in hand galloping up the road on a horse, I'd ask you to make certain that nothing happens to prevent Miss Scobie from the delight I know she's going to feel at being the official cutter of the ribbon."

Miss Scobie was escorted to the centre of the bridge by Mr. Jensen and before cutting the ribbon, she remarked on how lovely it was to see, in this the International Year of the Child, so many children present.

Miss Scobie recalled that her father always tried hard to prise as much money as possible out of the Government for

his area. According to Parliamentary records, Mr. Scobie was Member for the Hunter from 9 February 1889 to 25 June 1894, Member for Wentworth from 3 July 1901 to 16 July 1904 and Member for the Murray from 6 August 1904 until 15 August 1917.

Miss Scobie concluded . . .

"He was a wonderful Member of Parliament and to think the people of Darlington Point and district remember him!"

I was a good public servant for 35 years and today I stand in front of you at 93 years of age having played my part in all that I could do and having tried to do my bit for my country.

This is a beautiful country, everything you see around Griffith reminds me so much of the wonderful people in our country and the wonderful men in the Public Service in those wonderful Departments who do such a wonderful lot of good.

I have very, very much pleasure in saying that this ribbon is cut by the daughter of the late Robert Scobie who was your Member for so long."

After cutting the ribbon, Miss Scobie was presented with the scissors used for the ceremony. The unveiling of the memorial plaque by Mr. Jensen completed the official ceremony. ●

Due to the present late production of the Journal this article has been included in this issue of "Main Roads" rather than in the June 1979 issue.

Mr. Jensen unveils the memorial plaque to complete the opening ceremony.

